

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

In the Claims:

1. (currently amended) A protective layer comprising a viscoelastic foam substrate and a flexible skin at least partially enclosing said foam substrate, said flexible skin having a plurality of vent holes provided therein ~~at a location where~~ in a protective zone of said flexible skin overlies overlying said foam substrate, said vent holes providing fluid communication between the ambient environment and a portion of the surface of said foam substrate that ~~is located proximate said vent holes~~ underlies said protective zone, said flexible skin being a barrier to exhaustion of gas pressure from within said foam substrate to the ambient atmosphere on impact of said foam substrate, said plurality of vent holes being effective to regulate the local rigidity of said protective layer by permitting gas to escape at said protective zone at a rate that is dependent on the number and size of said vent holes through said flexible skin in said protective zone.

Claims 2-3: (canceled)

4. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said skin being formed integrally with said foam substrate.

5. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said skin being separately provided from said foam substrate and being subsequently molded thereto.

6. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said foam substrate comprising flexible polyurethane foam, said skin comprising a formable thermoplastic.

Claims 7-10: (canceled)

11. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said skin having a first protective zone and a second protective zone, each said protective zone of said skin having a plurality of vent holes provided therein effective to regulate the rigidity of said protective layer adjacent said protective zone, said protective layer being more rigid adjacent said first protective zone than adjacent said second protective zone by virtue of the relative size and/or density of vent holes provided in said first protective zone compared to in said second protective zone.

Claim 12: (canceled)

13. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 11, said protective layer being a seamless protective layer across both said first and said second protective zones.

Claims 14-15: (canceled)

16. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said foam substrate having a density of $104 \text{ kg/m}^3 \pm 30\%$.

17. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said foam substrate comprising a partially closed-cell polymeric foam.

18. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said protective layer being a seamless protective layer and having a first protective zone and a second protective zone, said protective layer being more rigid adjacent said first protective zone than adjacent said second protective zone, said foam substrate being seamless in the region of said first and said second protective zones.

19. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said skin having a porosity at least 10% lower than an outer surface of said foam substrate.

20. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said foam substrate being effective to recover to a substantial proportion of its original shape following deformation thereof resulting from an impact to said protective layer.

21. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, said foam substrate being effective to recover to at least 90% its original shape following deformation thereof from a high speed impact.

22. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 1, wherein said protective layer exhibits energy absorptive properties of a flexible or semi-rigid foam at impact speeds less than 5 mph thereby being effective to absorb impact energy through non-destructive, recoverable deformation of the foam substrate, and wherein said protective layer exhibits energy absorptive properties of a rigid foam at impact speeds greater than 15 mph thereby being effective to dissipate and absorb impact energy through deformation of the foam substrate.

23. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 22, said foam substrate being effective to recover to a substantial proportion of its original shape following deformation thereof resulting from an impact to said protective layer at a speed of greater than 15 mph.

24. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 23, said foam substrate being effective to recover to at least 90% its original shape following said deformation thereof.

Claims 25-26: (canceled)

27. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 22, said skin having a first protective zone and a second protective zone, each said protective zone of said skin having a plurality of vent holes provided therein effective to regulate the local rigidity of said protective layer adjacent said protective zone.

28. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 27, said protective layer being more rigid adjacent said first protective zone than adjacent said second protective zone.

29. (previously presented) A protective layer according to claim 22, said foam substrate being seamless in the region of said first and said second protective zones, said protective layer being more rigid adjacent said first protective zone than adjacent said second protective zone.

Claims 30-31: (canceled)

32. (new) A protective layer according to claim 1, wherein said plurality of vent holes are provided as an array of vent holes located in said protective zone.